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INDEX | press

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ISSUE FOUR

WINTER 2013 - SPRING 2015

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ISSUE FOUR

WINTER 2013 - SPRING 2015

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www.indexgallery.co.uk



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INDEX|editorial

It's been almost a year and a half since the last issue of INDEX|press, a time of change for us and also a time of planning for the future. The gallery has now moved from its site in Brewery Lane, and the final three exhibitions at that space are marked in this issue.

The gallery at Brewery Lane holds some wonderful memories – of packed opening nights, thrilling sound performances by Oogoo Maia, an absorbing series of artists' talks – but while we settle on a new gallery space, there are other exciting projects in development.

This issue of INDEX|press combines a survey of exhibitions from the missing 18 months at Index gallery with a look at one of the most celebrated yet neglected artistic movements to take root in Stroud. The idiosyncratically named GLOUP offered shelter to Gloucestershire's crop of concrete poets, a group whose renown was to spread far beyond their 1960s base at Ken Cox's Kingscote studio. Andrew Bick, who grew up next to the Prinknash Abbey home of one of GLOUP's leading lights, draws the connections between the movement's poets and artists, its makers and thinkers, and between then and now.

Richard Stone reports on Joanna Greenhill and Christopher Steadman's video exhibition as far as never before | so weit wie noch nie. It was a collaboration at distance – Greenhill in Stroud, Steadman in Berlin – with the two bringing their distinct

perspectives to bear on themes of travel, time, arrival and departure. The two artists plan and plot this coming together in an email exchange published here in edited form, in which they draw out the common ground of the Berlin U-Bahn and the ferry journey to the island of Islay.

A journey of a different kind is chronicled in Ali Kayley and Dan Glaister's *Nude in Road*. Installed on a loop at Index gallery, the final part in the artists' trilogy of short films following the route from Purgatory to Paradise makes Elisabetta Fabrizi wonder about myth, slapstick and the search for an earthly paradise.

In 1961 Robert Morris made a wooden box and recorded the process. That work, *Box With The Sound of its Own Making*, inspired Gavin McClafferty to stage his own version at Index gallery for last year's SITE festival. Paul Harper experiences an uplifting performance, while McClafferty tells Matt Curtis about the workshop as theatre and the gallery as prop.

Finally, the four INDEX directors would like to thank Gavin McClafferty for his inspirational work in setting up and propelling INDEX through the first stage of its history.

JOANNA GREENHILL & CHRISTOPHER STEADMAN

as far as never before | so weit wie noch nie



INDEX | gallery

October 2013

In Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway*, a train emerges out of the distance and the end of nineteenth-century romanticism, its ideals giving way to an oncoming modernity, about to meet the viewer head on.

It is a radical work, hinting at the perils of technology over nature. Joanna Greenhill and Christopher Steadman's video installation immediately counters this positioning of work and viewer, as we follow footage from the Berlin U-Bahn, traversing outwards from a post-industrial city, whilst a ferry boat moves out from mainland Scotland to the island of Islay, between one place and another, exploring arrival and departure.

Each video is combined as a complete, collaborative work, separate videos reconfigured and projected on to a single screen. Tilted forward at the base, the painting-like structure comes to resemble a sculpture, creating a visceral tension that gives it an uneasy but palpable power. It is a beautifully orchestrated move, abrasive in parts, with its stop/start motion, place to place and back again, but becoming balletic, languid in its ambition. A deliberate slowness underpins the unravelling of place, beginning to describe how it is to be in or between places at the same time, physically and mentally.

Richard Stone

AS FAR AS NEVER BEFORE

AN EMAIL EXCHANGE BETWEEN
JOANNA GREENHILL AND CHRISTOPHER STEADMAN.
THE INSTALLATION WAS CONCEIVED
BY THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE TWO,
HER IN STROUD, HIM IN BERLIN

Joanna Greenhill email 31.01.12

I like your idea of sharing a concept, a text, or a kind of location. Then we go and film it/make it separately and then see... Part of my learning of time [is] as an element to work with in a different way from durational drawings and sculpture. So the waxing and the waning of the light are of interest to me and relates to your 'day into night'.

Christopher Steadman email 3.02.12

For me video has always been about time, which made it different from photography and made it a medium that is not similar to film. I am happy to play with any structure, or no structure, but I am interested in working around a location or concept that we both interpret individually without awareness of each other's intentions.

JG email 6.02.12

The fixed camera point is quite a departure for me as I have always correlated moving with the camera to drawing – as a way into video work. But yes, it is the fixed point and watching change rather than affecting it through the body's movement, which interests me.

CS email 8.02.12

I have a few pieces I want to make. One piece that is from a fixed perspective of the same urban viewpoint. Another is also of an urban environment but in motion, filmed between the same two stations from an elevated U-Bahn throughout the duration of one day.

JG email 27.04.12

When I made sculpture I became obsessed with process and repetition,

and this limited the experience of making so much, made it mundane. So working with sculpture ideas into video medium is so much better in terms of the changing and adapting and all the challenges that are closer to living and being.

CS Email 12.08.13

I have played with some ideas of time-of-day and light, and also ideas of motion applied literally to life when in Berlin which doesn't provide me with this lovely sense of calm, melancholy, spatial horizon, water, boats, atmosphere, a metaphoric farewell... it actually made me realise that I am so in the present-tense that each time I couldn't get my head out of the claustrophobic sense of being in a city, displaced in a country which I don't feel connected to beyond the city limits, and so I started playing with some ideas of motion in the city which rather than provoke any melancholic sense of farewell (metaphoric or otherwise) I realised the filming would give me footage which is trapped in motion, watching the city passing by from the windows but almost seeming like there isn't a life beyond the windows.

JG Email : 12.8.13

[My] film will be much slower and simpler than your film as it a smoothish transition from one place to another and I think the two works will complement each other if they were projected opposite.

CS Email 12.10.13

I was thinking about the presentation and how having the two together one on top of the other might look good with your horizon line and slow boat moving and the horizon of my piece which is created by the way I'm editing but the pace of my film being quite frantic in comparison. I think the boat on the sea with the sky would make more sense presented above.

28.10.13

I know that you were always planning to do a film about the ferry journey. And to be fair, I have had in my head something about my U-Bahn line for a while. But I remember when the idea to collaborate was first mentioned. And ever since, it has always been in my head. Long before either of us had made our pieces, I was thinking about ways the works connect etc.

But I love the way it has developed. You made your piece. I submerged into studio mode. Made my piece. Conscious of a five minute duration. But then just had to let the piece go where it went and couldn't stop until it made sense that it stopped.

BEFORE THE FALL

THE ARRIVAL AT PARADISE IS THE STUFF OF
MYTH AND SUPERSTITION.
ALI KAYLEY AND DAN GLAISTER'S FILM
NUDE IN ROAD DOES IT FOR REAL

BY ELISABETTA FABRIZI



Nude in Road is exactly that: a one-minute loop of a lone male figure tentatively walking by the edge of a road, down a trodden path. While walking he gets undressed, shedding his ordinary clothes layer after layer, leaving them behind on the ground as if to mark his tracks. Once naked, he runs across the road in a comedic manner, falling yet making it to the other side. Finally, he disappears into what a road sign indicates is Paradise. For Roland Barthes, narrative was, 'simply there like life itself' and it is in this sense that the matter-of-fact yet absurd story of *Nude in Road* acts as a simple ploy to open up the work.



The film is the final part of *From Purgatory to Paradise*, a trilogy of 16mm film installations by artists Ali Kayley and Dan Glaister inspired by the presence on a map of two places: Purgatory – in the woods near Stroud - and Paradise, half a dozen miles away, near Painswick.

above: Expulsion from the Garden of Eden by Masaccio, 1425 (pre-restoration)
opposite: Coney Island, Buster Keaton, 1917

THEIR LATEST WORK CONJURES UP THE CENTURIES-LONG SEARCH FOR EARTHLY PARADISE AND, VIA THE TRADITION OF CARTOGRAPHY, THE BELIEF IN ITS PRESENCE ON EARTH

Gone is the jittering figure trying to get into Purgatory in the trilogy's first film, *Figure in Landscape*, 2013. Having left behind the thicket of exile and sequestration of the second film, *Flight Arrested*, 2013, he appears to have finally reached his destination: Paradise. In talking about the initial inspiration for this film installation the artists have mentioned Masaccio's *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (*La Cacciata dei Progenitori dall'Eden*, 1424-25), a fresco in the Cappella Brancacci in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence. Masaccio's simple yet complex depiction of disgrace describes the moment Adam and Eve are evicted from the Garden of Eden. At the time it was made, its apparent simple realism and the heightened emotions expressed by the figures allowed it to tell a basic but effective story everyone could understand: the fall from God's grace. It is in this tradition of high art deeply connected with the real that we find the roots of Ali Kayley/Dan Glaister's work. In exploring the myth of Paradise, their latest work conjures up the centuries-long search for earthly paradise and, via

the tradition of cartography, the belief in its presence on earth. It puts to the test, literally and metaphorically, the belief in paradise as a real place and the myth of the impossible journey to reach it.



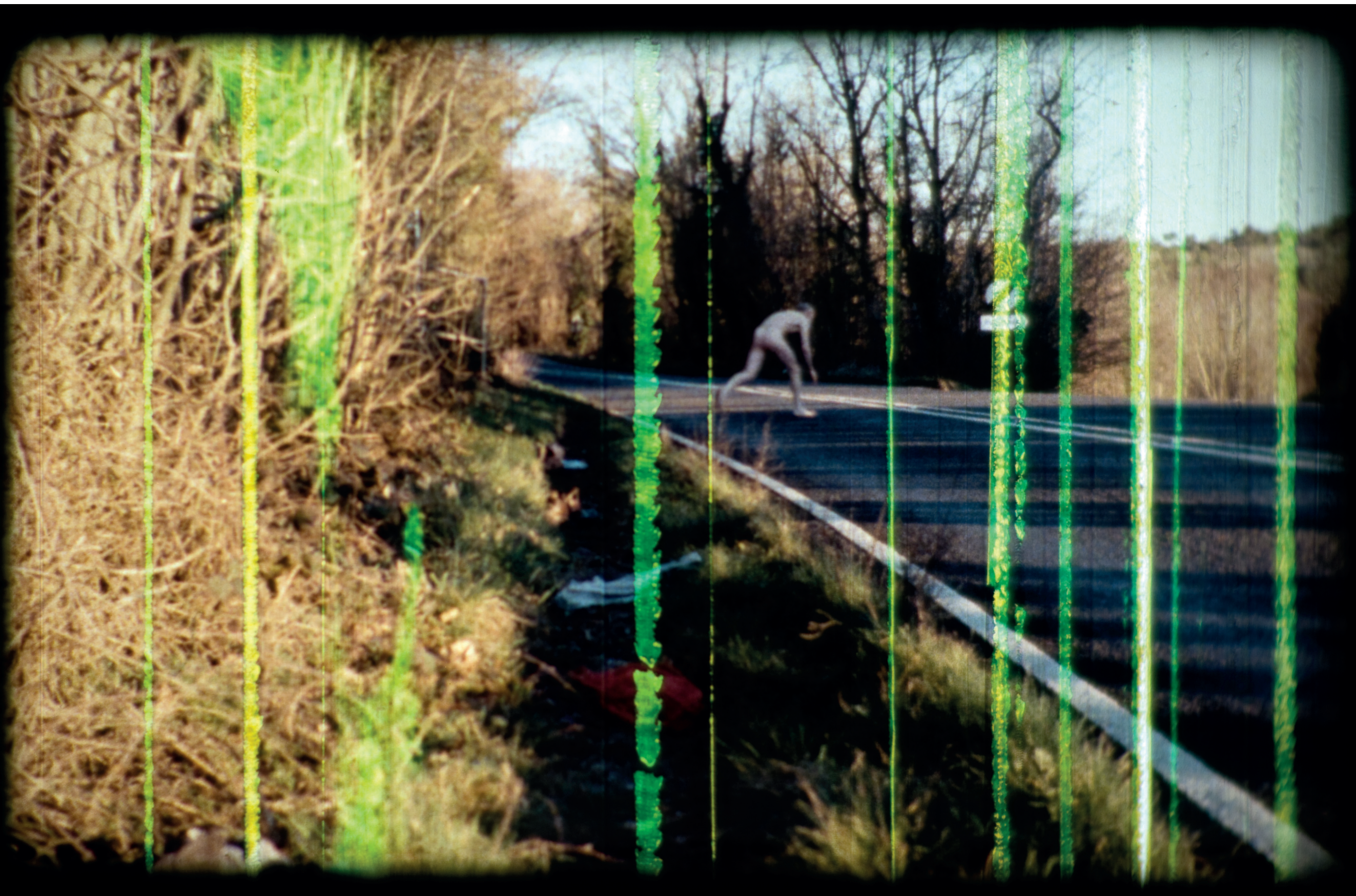
Yet in *Nude in Road* we find an ordinary road, and an ordinary figure trying to cross it. The montage carries an echo of the work of Jeff Wall. Like Wall, Kayley/Glaister share an interest in creating tableaux portraying apparently simple situations that are highly staged and composed, and reference art history. His influence, also present in *Figure in Landscape*, is made explicit in *Nude in Road* by the path the figure follows, a quotation of *The Crooked Path*, Wall's canonical 1991 photograph depicting a man-made path running through an ordinary field.

The man's almost imperceptible fall whilst trying to reach Paradise holds the key to *Nude in Road*. By literally - and ironically - putting the mythical idea of the Fall of Man to the test, the artists point out that what we all have in common is the fall as a category of

the soul. The clumsy run of the figure reminds us of the unfitness of reality in relation to the myth, the contrast between the rigours of journey and the ideal of the arrival. The reality of a man's fall whilst eagerly running becomes a metaphor for the experience of falling; the figure becomes an everyman exorcising our feelings of failure and mortality.

EVEN THE MEDIUM CHOSEN – FILM – IS TRANSIENT AND WE CAN SEE IT LITERALLY TRAVELLING AROUND THE ROOM AS PART OF THE INSTALLATION, COLLECTING SCRATCHES AND MARKS AS IT GOES ON ITS JOURNEY

Comedy is one means to counterbalance such fears, a device to disturb the certainties on which our vision of the world is based. One of its methods, slapstick, is more than an outmoded comedy style; loved by the avant-garde it is considered by many a link between popular filmmaking and experimental/art film. Slapstick's love for the absurd, within realistic settings and simple story lines, together with its use of jump cuts – a violation of continuity and the conventions of narrative editing – allowed it to highlight the disjunction



Nude in Road, degraded frame from installation



Nude in Road, Super 16mm film, installation

between the ideal and the real. The reference to slapstick in *Nude in Road* is far from accidental. And it is no accident that the only edit in *Nude in Road* – whilst the figure runs and falls – is achieved via a jump cut. The technique creates an effect of discontinuity, disrupting the narrative and acting as a pointer, reminding us that what we are seeing is not reality, but instead a union of matter-of-fact realism and elaborate artifice. The viewer is prompted to look again at the familiar landscape of the film and see it for what it is, a tight composition which makes the space appear flat and where the palette used, with its rich reds, blacks and the strong contrasts between sunlight and shadows, is a result of meticulous choices of film stock allowing the shot to appear simultaneously real and painterly.

But *Nude in Road* is not a painting, it is a film installation and the artists take the cinematic into a gallery space.

The 16mm film is projected onto a large screen positioned across one corner of a bare gallery, its film strip crawling in the darkness, almost undetected, from the projector onto and around the ceiling and back, its gentle bounces alerting the gallery visitor to its presence. The piece is silent: the only sound is that of film itself, as it loudly rattles through the projector, making materiality part of the content, and further disrupting the reality of the scene depicted.

Nude in Road concentrates on displacement: the landscape chosen is a road, a place of transit; the figure, appearing lost or somewhat displaced at the beginning of his transit, is in movement throughout the film; the path he follows bears the signs of past walks; and the central part of the shot is a tarmac road disappearing into the distance. Even the medium chosen – film – is transient and we can see it literally travelling around the room as part of



Nude in Road sign

**IT CONJURES UP
THE CENTURIES-
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THE FILM PUTS TO THE
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BELIEF IN PARADISE AS
A REAL PLACE AND
THE MYTH OF THE
IMPOSSIBLE JOURNEY
TO REACH IT**

the installation, collecting scratches and marks as it goes on its journey. In this sense *Nude in Road* explores ideas around the myth of paradise and our very mundane, real journeys towards it, while furthering Ali Kayley and Dan Glaister's explorations on belonging and displacement. Their interest is in the journey: after all, as Dante writes in the *Divine Comedy*, "... the path to paradise begins in hell...", and "... our course is set for an uncharted sea."

Elisabetta Fabrizi

Elisabetta Fabrizi is a curator and critic. She was Head of Exhibitions at the British Film Institute, London, and is the curator of screen based media at the Tyneside Cinema.

THE SUBSTANCE OF GLOUP

STROUD HAD ITS MOMENT IN THE SIXTIES
WITH THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE GROUP
OF CONCRETE POETS.
AS INTEREST IN THEIR WORK IS
REVIVED, **ANDREW BICK** TRACES A
SINGULAR HISTORY



AMOR
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AMOR

The 1960s, famously the open and experimental decade of the 20th century, had its own moment in Gloucestershire, when the county hosted a level of intellectual curiosity and internationalism that put it at the forefront of the concrete poetry movement. By making the act of reading visual, concrete poetry became an interface not just between many different kinds of artist, but also divergent individual thinkers, dreamers and idealists.

GLOUP, Gloucestershire group of concrete) P(oets), was the name given to Kenelm Cox, John Furnival, Charles Verey and Dom Sylvester Houédard, known by his initials, dsh. According to dsh's Times obituary of Ken Cox in 1968, it was the American poet Jonathan Williams who came up with the near acronym GLOUP. This innocuous and playful name belies the fact that the group arrived at a form of collaboration that was also an international exchange through correspondence, publishing and exhibition organisation.

The outwardly modest nexus that gathered around dsh and in Ken Cox's studio in Kingscote has proved, with hindsight, to be significant. Their energetic output found its way to the Lisson Gallery in London, which was by then building a reputation in the UK and beyond as a centre for radical art.

Today the group's work can only be accessed through museum archives, library rare book collections, specialist book dealers and the Sackner Archive in Miami Beach, Florida. The research it has inspired has, however, brought increased demand for it to made more visible again and its echoes in contemporary practice bring yet more substance to the idea of its reconsideration.

Notes from the Cosmic Typewriter, the collection of essays edited by Nicola Simpson and published in 2012, is part of a revival of interest in concrete poetry's impact. Reconsideration of this impact has also been given new momentum by the renewed interest in the avant-garde movements of South America and their parallels with European practice, particularly Swiss Concrete Art, which was significant for the earliest concrete poets in Brazil, Germany and Switzerland.

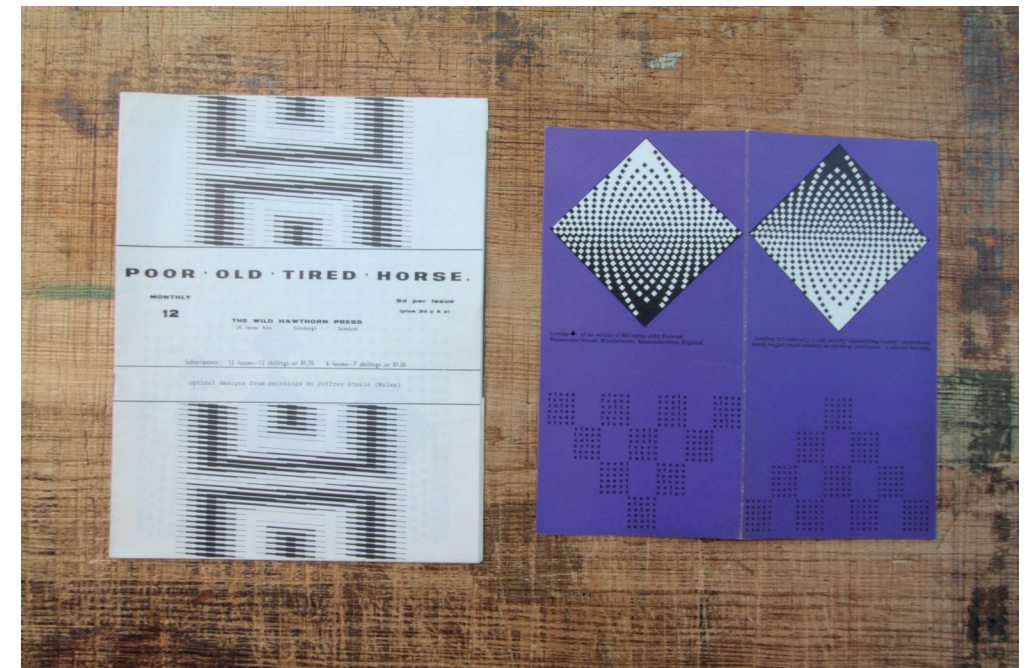
BY MAKING THE ACT OF READING VISUAL, CONCRETE POETRY BECAME AN INTERFACE NOT JUST BETWEEN MANY DIFFERENT KINDS OF ARTIST, BUT ALSO DIVERGENT INDIVIDUAL THINKERS, DREAMERS AND IDEALISTS

Writing about the work of the earlier, more established concrete poet Ian Hamilton Finlay, the academic Stephen Bann argues for such poetry's poignancy, capable of reminding the reader of "the gulf between what man can construct and what he actually is". The human need to create, to pay attention to the moment in which things come into being, as much as the ambiguity that lies between the acts of constructing and apprehending things, form the paradigm

at the heart of concrete poetry's fertility as an art form across languages, philosophies (and for dsh in particular), religions. The specific dynamism of this visual/poetic position, of concrete poetry's manner of operation, if you like, has few comparisons, pre or post the Internet age. Within contemporary understanding, perhaps the contemplative world of dsh, complete with his intellectualism, theological scholarship, extraordinary back-story in the intelligence services and very

their practice. dsh, his output and his collaborations represent a call to live and work outside current cultural amnesia, based, as he was, in the understanding that tradition can also be radical.

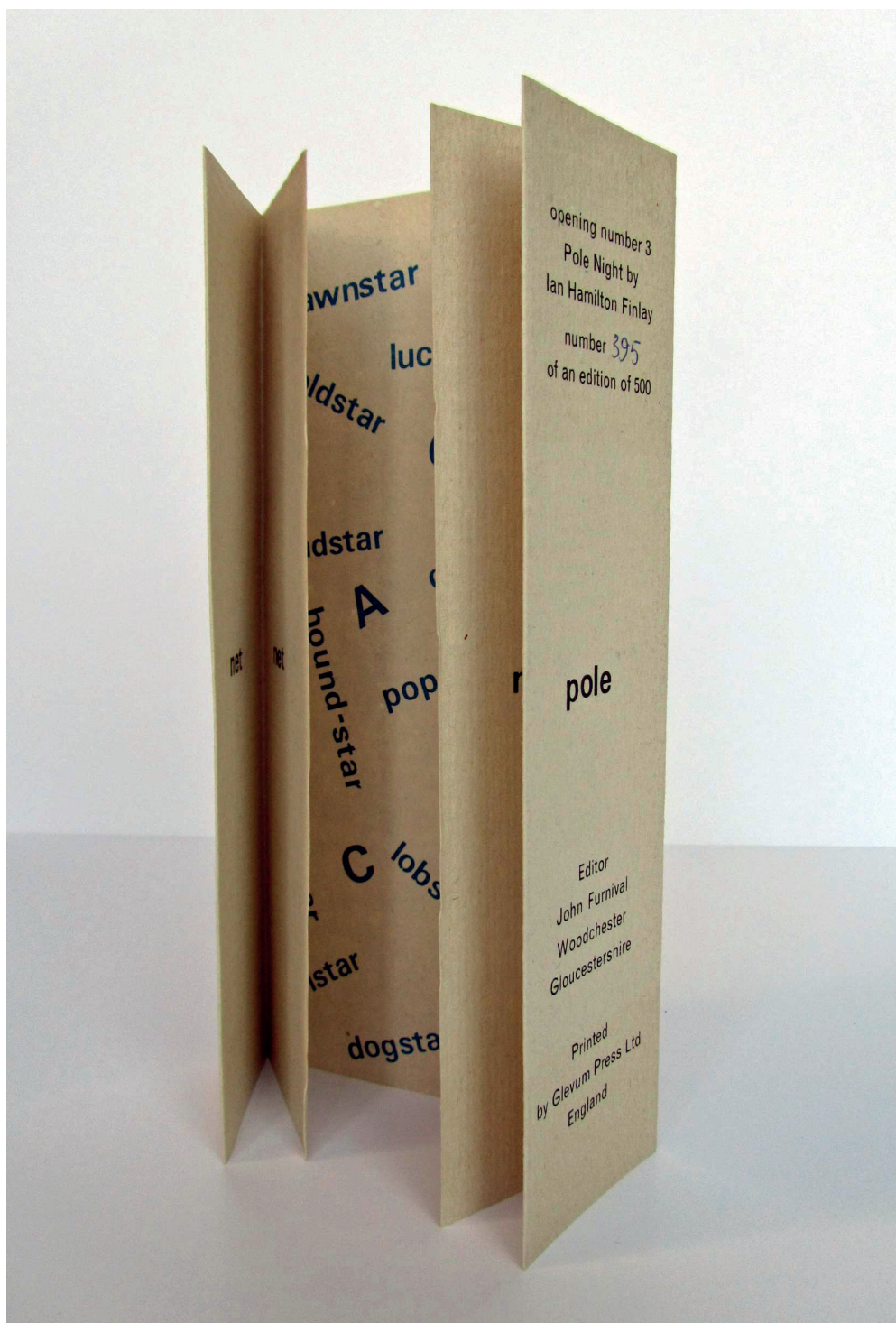
Concrete Poetry seems not only to embrace contradiction at its core (Bann's poignancy), but also to revel in it as an engine of production. dsh in particular reaches beyond any idea of piety and equally refutes new-ageism, despite some of the wilder flights of



left: P.O.T.H no. 12, cover Jeffrey Steele, right: Jeffrey Steele and Augusto do Campos, openings no. 2, Openings Press, 1965, photographed in Steele's studio, July 2012

modern sense of his own sexuality, is at the core of a rich legacy because the energy it contains is so rooted in a constructive form of ambiguity. Figures such as dsh, who spent much of his adult life in the monastery at Prinknash Abbey, are arguably iconic in their contradictory and contrary humanity; his spirituality was a way of being that he took in to every context, making him a necessary figure for those seeking rootedness for

fancy in his texts. dsh is too grounded in orthodox theology and well-versed in its complexities to be an appealing figure for those who like to see casual spirituality in visual art. Cox's career, in contrast, was cut tragically short by a traffic accident and his evolution from conventional landscape painter to kinetic sculptor and constructor of word-poems contains more modest-seeming insights only because of the relative lack of time



Ian Hamilton Finlay, STANDING POEM 4 (POLE / NIGHT) (1969) 4½" x 9" (folded), 500 numbered copies, published as Opening Number 3, edited by John Furnival

he had. The romanticized idealism in some of Cox's statements about his work could be construed as a relatively young artist feeling his way around his ideas, seeking, as he said, to "exorcise some of the machine's terrifying aspects and give it some charm." In contrast, dsh's total lack of mechanical practicality needed Cox's quiet, measured approach to material and machine. Along with his considerable skill at drawing, these gifts enabled Cox to realise some extraordinary objects in his brief career. The physical way which these objects operated, the mesmerising, slow turn of his bronze SUNCYCLE word/objects and the gentle, playful mechanics of sculptures such as AMOR eloquently mark out his transition from classically trained landscape painter to poet/sculptor.

Furnival seems at his best as a collaborator. His work on Openings Press, with dsh, has in common with Hamilton Finlay's little magazine Poor Old Tired Horse a brilliant way of combining artist and poet. Furnival also brought great production skills in terms of printmaking to these collaborations. Hamilton Finlay's POLE / NIGHT, 1969, Openings Number 3 from the series, combines word and structure, through the careful use of six folds, to create a standing paper object which can be turned in several permutations to give different word combinations. This piece has a flexibility and spareness which can only have emerged from an artistic equilibrium, like the best of Finlay's work, but also, in Furnival's case, a product of a discipline not always evident in his individual output.

With hindsight it is evident that Finlay, and in particular his magazine Poor Old

Tired Horse, was crucial for this very specific interface between visual art and concrete poetry. In Gloucestershire the extended local influence of the work of Thomas A Clark and Laurie Clark at Cairn Gallery, beyond their departure for Scotland in 2004 has been to do with its commitment to internationalism from its outset. Thomas A Clark was originally drawn to the Stroud valleys in order to meet Ken Cox, dsh, John Furnival and Charles Verey in the mid-1960s. In his words, this was because of their "sharp, energetic, widely influential" approach to concrete poetry. The links between the GLOUP group, Hamilton Finlay and Cairn Gallery leave a thread of connectivity that has lasted for more than 30 years.

**THE GROWTH IN
CREATIVE WRITING
AND OBLIQUE FORMS
OF WRITING SEEMS
TO BE SPREADING IN
THE WORLD OF VISUAL
ART, ALONGSIDE
DIVERGENT WAYS OF
PUBLISHING, WHERE
CUTTING EDGE AND
REDUNDANT FORMS
OF TECHNOLOGY
CAN BE MADE TO
WORK TOGETHER**

Both the art market and common forms of publishing now seem to be polarising and homogenising in ways where the real loss is that of specific forms of attentiveness to the individual, eccentric, divergent and non-compliant. Figures such as the protagonists of GLOUP seem more necessary now than ever because of the position they represent as much as what they did. Currently, discussion of the growth in creative writing and oblique forms of writing seems to be spreading in the world of visual art, alongside divergent ways of publishing, where cutting edge and redundant forms of technology can be made to work together. Artists are always quick to adapt to new ways of communicating as well as being good at organising themselves into small collective cells of activity. This was what GLOUP, Openings Press and dsh would have been doing. Coracle Press continues to work in the Irish Republic, Cairn Editions in Scotland. These models of exchange are undoubtedly finding equivalence in parallel younger organisations in London such as Arcadia Missa, Banner Repeater and Furnished Space, as well as the relatively recent evolution of long-established art publisher Book Works towards an emphasis on artists experimenting with text. All of which demonstrate a cultural interface - a sort of aesthetic ecumenism - that suggests that the ways of thinking in which figures like dsh featured so significantly are far from over.

Andrew Bick

Andrew Bick is an artist, curator and researcher at University of Gloucestershire and Kingston University

prinkmashabbey - 290466

my dear **Ken**

thanks for yr all yr greenletters - i have been doing so many things iansue only one of them - oliverhill offers him a cottage with a waterfall but no roof in argyll - the mackinnons may offer a cottage in skye - there is the caretaker's cottage at arlington - the abbot has invited ^{very} him for lunch on ascensionday (they kissed eachother last time he came here) i wonder if i shld write BEFORE that? - ive mentioned all these to ian & also suggested that he put (have put) note in architectural review SAYING that all is destructed & the poet is in need of new place - SOMETHING might come of it - ian must also go to hospital to have an abscess removed - jessie has offered to take them in at balerno wh isnt italy but the heart of midlothian

before writing out pages & pages of technical details abt my poems wld it be best to describe BRIEFLY just a few so that w/ yr knowledge of clockwork (clockword was pleasant invention of this clever twr) & acutronics & you can see the more obviously realiseable ones & those that wld cost \$1m & the resources if cape canaveral

1
the balloon poem (in french: ie BALON)(sorry BALLON)

o b_o b_o b_ol b_ol

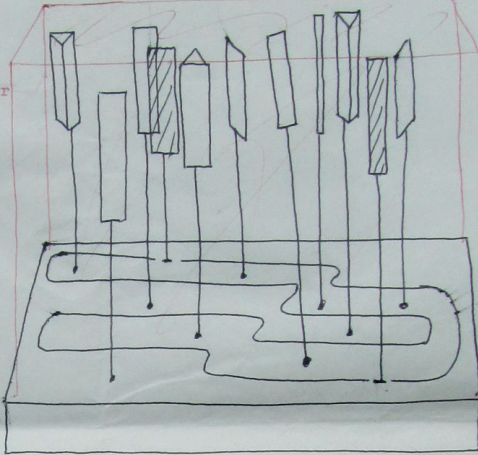
begin down here: bal_l bal_l l_al al_l a_n a &c

& repeat with letters going up & up a tall screen - they shld go up in a different pattern each time (if letters old tumble down from top jumping down from floor to floor* all the better) - problem is whether letters wld flash OFF (& then flash on again in new place) - OR be seen to float from position 1 to position 2: this wld be two basic mechanisms applicable to all my Kinetic (no - to MANY of my k) poems: note a this poem old be with more letters (say 9: 16) that wld reform in different combinations each time b in either case a screen might be conceivable that old have MANY poems programmed on it c even a screen might be possible with many letters at bottom & say a selector magnet moving over them that wld select only when activated by a button: viewer old operate button NOT KNOWING which letter was set was over: letters wld be deposited one by one in pre-selected positions on screen - this old ^{be} a simplified version in sense that letters old rise from base to a word-line letter by letter - this begins to approach a random typewriter

2


i have small sketches with words all in different forms and stages but of 21

5
BALLET POEM
vertical words (preferably abstract phonetic words) on tall cards (some cards flat some triangular ie prism shaped) on long pins elegantly rotating at different speeds - & 2 or 3 others gliding pavane -like between the others all ververy slow & majestic - perhaps a spotlight on the primaballerina &/or premier danseur - some cards old flip round instantaneously at least occasionally - the lights old dim till say only 2 words were lit - a twist or a glider - tho conceived as something this old be made jazzy - some words old lean a crazy bit - or just teeter along



* like the 2 striped ones in sketch

6
NEAR THE GUERNSEY COAST
this was designed in TWO versions: a has only 2 words visible at once: each word is made up of an initial letter & 4 extra letters: the initial letters are G or B: the 4 extra letters are either ULLS or OATS: the words are written one over the other - - - - - & the letters flash on & off: there are 16 combinations which may either appear in a fixed sequence or appear in a different sequence in each round; b has 4 words appearing at once - 2 on each side of a vertical line (which represents the coast) here there are 2 BB 2 GG 2 ULLS & 2 OATS - visually it wld be best if the transfer of the letters took place by floating or gliding: there wld be little point in exchanging the 2 Bs etc tho this operation could be introduced as occasional relief: basically there wld always be the words BULLS BOATS GULLS & GOATS but constantly interchanging with each other: ie 2 initials or 2 endings wld detach the selves & float across to exchange positions: if they float it wld of course be best to have 12 distinct tracts for them to follow rather than just 6 (tho either wld do) for variety



7
15 (or 24) letter POEM
4x4 or 5x5 square of letters: one blank: letters wld slide as in chinese puzzle from one position to the adjacent blank: the 4 corners old each shift in 2 directions: the 8 others on the boundary old shift in 3: the 4 centre ones in 4: 4x2 8x3 4x4 = 48 operations (in a 4x4 square: it wld be 80 operations in a 5x5 square); an alternative presentation wld be for all except ONE LINE to be screened (the line is in wh the blank HAD BEEN)*

dsh letter to Ken Cox, 1966, courtesy Margaret Cox

TIME'S CONTAINER

A WORKSHOP-GALLERY,
SOME POWER TOOLS AND A PLINTH.
FIVE AND A HALF HOURS LATER
GAVIN McCLAFFERTY HAD BUILT A BOX.
WHY DID HE DO IT?

BY PAUL HARPER

A plain wooden cube sits on a plinth in the centre of the gallery. It has been precisely crafted using a fine-grained, pale coloured fruitwood. A speaker, secreted inside the box, plays out the sounds produced in the course of its making. This audio component lasts for five and a half hours, the time that it took to make the box.

For [...] and non-pure Gavin McClafferty has reproduced a work first made by Robert Morris in 1961. The title of Morris's sculpture was Box with the sound of its own making (referred to hereafter as Box), which states clearly and simply what it is.

On an early summer evening a group has gathered at the site of this re-staging, Index. We are here to experience the work, which was completed in the same space only a couple of hours ago. As we sit in a circle, my attention wanders between the object itself; the recording and the imagined making process that it evokes; my sense of the space and its location, including the residual smell of wood-dust and the ambient sounds of the environment; my drifting thoughts and the discussion that the work has provoked. This discussion is focused on locating the original piece in the art-historical canon and on theoretical issues surrounding the re-staging and re-presenting of past artworks.

Morris was one of the key theorists and practitioners of Minimalism, as well as playing a pioneering role in other, post-Minimalist, movements such as Process Art and Land Art. In much of his work he focused on the importance of the context in which it was produced and subsequently experienced by the audience, indeed to some degree he abandoned traditional sculptural

concerns such as composition and form in favour of engagement with the viewer. He often treated the presentation of his work as a performance, animated by the interaction of audience, location and artwork.

Morris insisted that art could no longer be restricted by the established categories of painting and sculpture but had evolved into something "more complex and expanded". Box exemplifies this position, extending the performative nature of the sculpture to include the elements of sound and time. Box is a record or container of time.

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The first person that Morris invited to see Box was his friend, the composer John Cage. Cage immediately recognized the piece as a theatrical experience and sat before it, listening to the entire recording.



The connection with Cage, and its importance for me in understanding [...] and non-pure, was given emphasis by a programme of music, including Cage's, presented at Index in association with the re-staging. This performance was part of an on-going dialogue between McClafferty and the composer and musician Oogoo Maia around their shared interest in process. Absorbed in the highly detailed sounds and indeterminate structures of the music, listening intently to the actions of the musicians, I found myself hyper-aware of all noise, inside and outside the room: my own breathing; my neighbour shifting

position; bird song; a distant dog barking; cars passing on the road below. If this description sounds solipsistic, I would argue that art has a special capacity to turn our (both artists and audiences) attention inwards but not in a way that removes us from the world, rather, as we are drawn inwards by the experience of the work, so we experience a deeper connection outwards, towards the world.

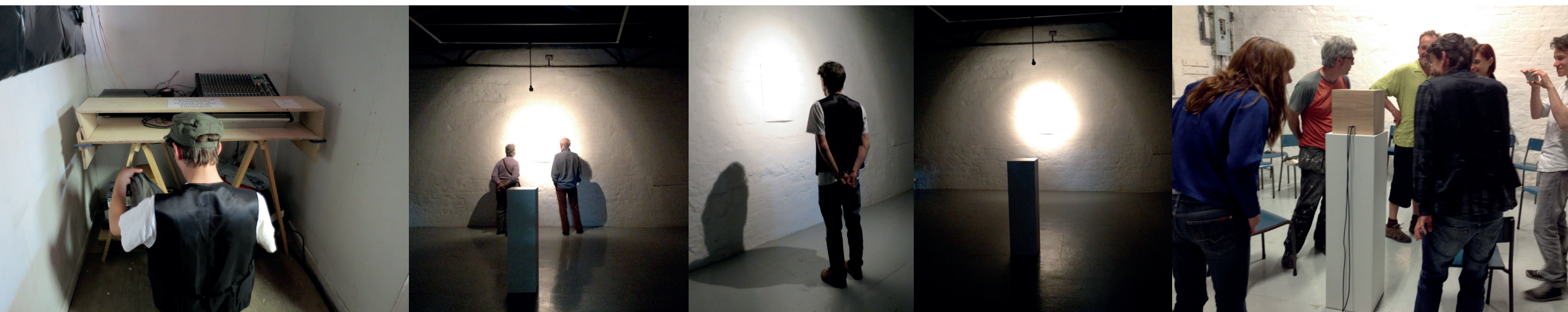
The continuing power and relevance of Box surely doesn't lie in its carefully arbitrated and calibrated art historical importance, or because it expresses a theoretical position about what might be

included in the category of sculpture, but rather in the way that it builds a bridge between the object and the experience of its making, and the way that it draws us, the viewers, into the richness of that experience and by extension, the potential richness of all experience.

The site for this re-staging was McClafferty's studio, which was also the location of Index. It is a space that operated within the dynamic of studio/workshop and gallery/project space, and as such it provided an apt context. One of the things that Morris seems to suggest is that art, after all, is merely

a high-minded activity grounded in the workaday business of woodwork.

Paul Harper



GAVIN McCLAFFERTY

IN CONVERSATION WITH MATT CURTIS

Matt Curtis – Why did you want to restage Box with the Sound of Its Own Making?

Gavin McClafferty – The process of making is very central to my enjoyment and my continued engagement in art. I have always been very interested in Morris's sculpture, it had reached this kind of iconic status in my mind and I have never seen it. I was interested in how the work seemed to describe these ideas that were current and I thought that by actually doing it like an exercise I would discover something about the work that I wouldn't necessarily do by just going to visit it. I wanted to be like an art student who copies a Rembrandt in order to perfect their brush technique.

M – The theatre of what happened that afternoon when you were making the box was a very powerful part of the whole piece. Is it the most important part?

G – The theatre part is important, I wanted people to walk into that gallery space and feel like they have entered another space, for it to be immersive. I was encouraging people to become curious so that they might begin to explore the space a little bit more. They might come across the text on the wall, they might come across the sound desk, maybe peer through the window at this guy making something. Although that's the sound you can hear he's in this other room he's divorced. Separated.

M – In many ways you're not restaging the original at all. It's a reinterpretation.

G – It moves from being a homage and becomes my own exploration.

M – Did you feel any obligation to be faithful to the making or showing of the original work?

G – Its art historical context for me was limited to books. The work sits on this shift, a pivotal moment, almost at the birth of post-modernism where suddenly the object on the plinth is actually speaking to the entire room. It starts to spill out. The sculpture starts to spill off the plinth and into the room. You start to get the relational dynamics of groups of people simultaneously interacting or reacting to the same source. So that is theatre I guess. I'm being true to those kind of ideas, I'm making the sculpture in front of you and there's this empty plinth and there is the object at the end. We're talking about a studio workshop



Box with the Sound of its own making, Robert Morris, © Seattle Art Museum

space attached to a gallery space. That was key to me being able to render that piece of work and to the conceiving of it. That idea of the theatre being in the dark and there's nothing happening but there's all this work going on backstage preparing for the next show. The other important element was that it was SITE festival, artists were turning their studios into gallery spaces so you have the theatre of that too. I had people coming to that little window and peering in and seeing the artist at work like a living museum piece trying to remake a piece of work. I'm also critiquing how the artist references art history and the subjective nature of all of that. There's a contradiction, suddenly I'm not remaking it. I'm reinterpreting what I can from what is in the archive. I've never seen the work. I'm going off photographs and the museum descriptions of it. I'm looking at the sizes of the box and thinking, 'Well, that's more or less the size of his head. I bet you Morris has designed that box based on the longest dimension of his head. So if I'm making a box I'm going to take that dimension from my head.'"

M – So adding these layers of mythology to his original piece.

G – Yes. I can only offer my interpretation. Those sizes are now going to become subjective and they are going to relate directly to me. Morris's box was made from walnut, mine was apple. American black walnut was indigenous to him but the fruit woods that were available to me included apple. I just thought, Apple and walnut! That's really nice isn't it?

M – Because they go really well together on a cracker?

G – Why not? I had no idea how hard it was. I was learning how to machine it as I went along.

M – Presumably you were feeling quite a lot of time pressure. You had a deadline that Morris didn't have. Did the process of you making it feel a bit like a job?

G – That was also one of the motivating factors behind this work. I was reflecting on having had to convert my studio into a wood workshop. I was looking at my woodworking tools and machinery and thinking, 'How does this make art?' I started to think about artists who used the workshop in their practice and that's how I arrived at Robert Morris. There was this machine sitting there that I use to make bookshelves allowing me to explore something from art history which was all about making. That was really important. The gallery became a prop.

M – So the gallery became a prop in the end and not the main vehicle for exposing the work to the public.

G – The gallery was still important because it created that interplay. We were broadcasting the sound into that blacked out space and you are looking at an empty plinth. In a way at that point you are actually inside Morris's box. The gallery is like a container of all of that activity that artists put into putting on shows. Suddenly you are inside the box with the sound. That commentary on the space itself is important.